

## STEP AND STOP



This activity has been one of the most helpful for my clients. It involves breaking down a series of stepping movements into fewer pieces. Before participants move to any other position, they steady themselves and then continue when they're ready. Later you can apply this concept to many mobility activities. It works great!

### **Benefits »**

- ⦿ Facilitates somatic learning (listening to the body's sense of balance).
- ⦿ Teaches a technique that is helpful for transitions.

### **How to Do It »**

#### **The Start**

- ⦿ Participants stand in front of a wall with a chair beside them, or they stand in a corner with a chair or walker in front of them. It is fine for them to keep their hands on a balance support for this activity.
- ⦿ Place a line 12 to 18 inches (30 to 40 centimeters) in front of them. You can use tape, chalk, a ruler or yardstick, or a design on the floor. The line is their visual target for where they will be tapping their foot.

#### **The Moves**

- ⦿ Do a few Step and Stops without the stops.
  - Participants tap one foot on the line, and bring it back beside the other foot.
  - Tap the other foot on the line.
  - Did they notice any instability going back and forth? (probably) Did one leg do better than the other? (it's common)
- ⦿ Now do a few Step and Stops with each foot a few times.
  - This time, they tap one foot out and leave it there, momentarily, until they're comfortable, steady, and ready to pull the foot back. Cue with different words for regaining their balance between steps: Steady, rebalance, hesitate, hold, get steady and ready, step and stop.
  - Continue, using each leg a few times. Tap the line (stop and steady), back (steady), tap (balance), back (hold), tap (rebalance), back (stop); step, stop, step, stop.
  - Rebalance, or steady themselves with change in foot position. Step and stop, step and stop. The little hesitations help steady balance.
- ⦿ Begin alternating feet.
  - Right tap, stop; back, stop. Left tap, stop; back, stop.
  - Start with just 2 taps (1 right, 1 left) and progress to doing 8 taps (4 right, 4 left).
  - Use the same kinds of cues and a slow, doable but deliberate cadence: Step, stop, back, stop; step, stop, back, stop; and so on.
- ⦿ Cue participants to *feel* their bodies' transitions from left to right and to notice the sensations of weighting and un-weighting.
  - How does it feel to change legs? Do they notice one leg must be unweighted to move the other and then their weight must shift back?

- Are they keeping their knees soft? (they should) Does it help? (yes)
- Is their core stable? (yes) Are the shoulders staying over the hips? (yes , they should be)

### **Give It More Balance »**

- ⊙ Count a cadence out loud for them in sets of four, then eight. You can also have the participants count the cadence out loud.
- ⊙ Play appropriate music.
  - For slower music, try “Tennessee Waltz.”
  - A little faster music could be “Blueberry Hill.”
  - Progress to doing a whole song’s worth. Vary the stepping patterns.
- ⊙ Advanced: Have them do this with hands on their hips.
- ⊙ Have them tap their foot on a short step instead of a line. The added height of a small step is a much bigger balance challenge.

### **Keep it Safe »**

- ⊙ Make sure participants have ample balance support; wall or corner behind, railing beside or a walker in front.
- ⊙ Take time to work through the progressions: One leg at a time, before alternating legs. Start with just two taps on the line. An even cadence will help.
- ⊙ Practice frequently. It is a skill that takes time and practice.

### **Live It »**

Smooth stepping transitions can be tricky, icky tasks for participants. Mastering them with a tool that really helps, like Step and Stop, can boost their confidence and keep them more active.